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MOHAMMEDAN GNOSTICISM IN AMERICA.  
THE ORIGIN, HISTORY, CHARACTER, AND ESOTERIC DOCTRINES OF THE TRUTH-KNOWERS.

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MR. BENJAMIN KIDD, in his brilliant work, *Social Evolution*, points out how irrationally neglectful the intellectual classes have always been in the study of religious phenomena, "the pivot upon which the whole drama of human history and human development turns." He calls attention to their failure in ancient Rome to grasp the significance of Christianity, unfolding before their eyes. Although it was destined to destroy and supersede their boasted civilization, their attitude toward it was that of either active hostility or passive contempt. "The intellectual scrutiny which had undermined the old faiths saw nothing in the new." He also quotes upon the point the following pregnant passage from W. E. H. Lecky, the historian :

That the greatest religious change in the history of mankind should have taken place under the eyes of a brilliant galaxy of philosophers and historians who were profoundly conscious of the decomposition around them; that all these writers should have utterly failed to predict the issue of the movement they were observing; and that during the space of three centuries they should have treated as simply contemptible an agency which all men must now admit to have been, for good or evil, the most powerful moral lever that has ever been applied to the affairs of men, are facts well worthy of meditation in every period of religious transition.<sup>1</sup>

Few thinking men doubt that our time is a period of religious transition, or at least religious reconstruction; yet sober meditation upon the subject, or serious study of its phenomena, is as yet largely wanting. Like the intellectual classes of the dead civilization, those of our own time are "either actively hostile or" (in a vast majority of cases) "passively contemptuous" toward any religious fact, movement, or discussion. It would probably

<sup>1</sup> *Social Evolution*, p. 134.

excite but little remark among them to be told that a Mohammedan sect had obtained a foothold in America and was, under the veil of secrecy, spreading rapidly. Yet, for all that, it seems to me worth while to call attention to this sinister fact which has come under my notice. For of all the strange cults, oriental vagaries, theosophic maunderings, and morbid hallucinations that have of late years invaded this country, perhaps the most curious, and certainly the most pernicious, is that of the Babists, a secret Mohammedan sect which I discovered some time ago in Wisconsin, and since then in Chicago, under the name of "Truth-Knowers."

Ibrahim Kheiralla, the propagandist of the sect, claims to have converted two thousand Americans in the space of two years. How far this boast is true I am unable in every particular to verify; but there is no room to doubt that the man has had incredible success. I have personally seen large, well-organized congregations of his converts both in Kenosha, Wis., and in Chicago. I have also reasons to believe their claims that similarly growing assemblies are holding their secret meetings in every large city of the United States. This is the more remarkable when we recall the fact that never before in the history of the world has a Mohammedan sect taken root among a Christian people without the aid of the sword. I believe it would not have happened today had it come bearing its own proper name, flying its own native colors. It has succeeded because, like a counterfeit coin, it has passed for what it is not. Most of the converts hardly realize what they have embraced, or whither they are drifting. I consider it a duty, therefore, to tell the American people what I know of this secret and mysterious sect, and what are its origin, character, and purposes.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> I base my statements in this article upon, first, my personal knowledge of the cult gained by taking eleven of their "private" lessons in Kenosha, Wis.; and, secondly, upon two articles on "The Babis" in Vol. XXI of *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, and two books: *A Traveller's Narrative* and *The New History*, all by PROFESSOR EDWARD G. BROWNE, of Cambridge, England, the greatest authority on Babi-Behaism. The two last-mentioned books are translations from Persian, with rich annotations by Professor Browne. The volumes have scientific value aside from their immediate or original object. All articles on the subject in the encyclopædias are worthless on account of their unreliable sources. A scholarly mastery of Babism also

After a careful study, I have named this newly imported cult "Mohammedan Gnosticism," a term that will readily suggest to the student its character, its origin, and its component elements.

Mohammedanism, called by its followers Islam, is the religion founded in 622 A. D. by Mohammed, in Arabia. It is a hybrid religion, strongly influenced by Jewish and Christian elements, gathered and garbled by the illiterate Arabian from hearsay, and, therefore, misconceived, misstated, and misapplied. According to Mohammed, Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus "the son of Mary," and himself are prophets of successively rising authority; himself being the last and greatest, *the* Prophet. Hence the axis of the creed of Islam is, "There is no God but Allah, and Mohammed is his prophet."

Another characteristic to be noticed in Mohammed's religion is its retrogressive nature. Although Islamism adopted many Jewish conceptions, it degraded them, and made them cruder and harsher. Take, for instance, the conception of Jewish monotheism. While Christianity raised the idea of Jehovah, and not only raised it, but refined and softened it in such a way that he was conceived as the God of righteousness and love, even "our Father who is in heaven" (hence believers are his children, all others, their unreclaimed brothers); Mohammedanism, on the contrary, degraded the idea and made it narrow and heartless, until Allah was conceived of as an oriental autocrat, powerful and despotic. Hence believers are his subjects; all others, his enemies, whom to destroy is a work of piety. It is for this reason that the Turks, the most orthodox of Mohammedans, have become the "anti-human specimen of humanity."<sup>3</sup> The quality of the idea of God always reflects itself in the character and conduct of the believers. It should be remembered, also, that Mohammed did not formally reject the Bible; but by rating the Quran, his own book, as a higher revelation, he practically

requires a knowledge of the following cults and words: Gnosticism, Sabianism, Islam, Sufism, and Mahdi, with the following Shiah Mohammedan sects: the Ismailis, Assassins, Ali-Allahis, Druses, and Sheikhis.

<sup>3</sup>"The Merciful" is one of the most common names Mohammedans give to Allah, but it seems to be more of an abject flattery than a confession of belief.

annulled for his followers its authority. In the same way, putting himself in place of Christ, whose work he claimed to be finishing, Mohammed repealed the authority of Christianity, under the guise of accepting it.

Gnosticism was that religious-philosophical movement which during the early ages of our era attempted to destroy Christianity by pretending to accept it. The Gnostics first professed acceptance of Christ's teachings, then allegorized, paganized, and explained them away. To their own believers the Gnostic teachers could explain away the plainest of Scripture statements. Their principal characteristics were: (*a*) A claim of exclusive knowledge, *gnosis*, hence they were called Gnostics, "knowers." (*b*) They pried into the mysteries of the beginning and end of things, talked much about æons or demiurges, or emanations of God or from God, among whom, in a chain of being, they included Jesus Christ. By some of the Gnostics, Jehovah of the Old Testament was held to be either an inferior emanation from Deity or a fallen angel, but in either case the creator of the visible world, from whose prison-house of matter Christ, his antagonist, had come to save mankind through knowledge, not through faith. (*c*) Like the Kabbalists, they put great stress on the power of certain letters and the combination of certain numbers. (*d*) Furthermore, Gnosticism was an eclectic system: it drew its material and inspiration from all religions and all philosophies, striving unscientifically to reconcile them. In this hopeless attempt the Gnostics resorted to allegorical interpretation of the sacred books, tampered with their texts, and took the liberty of interpolating new passages and even of composing new gospels of Christ's life. (*e*) Their teaching was esoteric, and their membership consisted of two classes: the imperfect or seekers, and the perfect or knowers. Their most noted teachers were Cerinthus, Basilides, and Valentinus. The cult attained historic significance during the second century, and lasted until about the fourth. Since then it has reappeared by degrees in various places and modified forms, as among the Manicheans, the Paulicians, the Bogomils, and the Albigenses, but has never taken permanent root, except among the Mohammedans.

Mohammedan Gnosticism, the combination of these two singular combinations, was born in Persia. Although Mohammed accepted the gospels as the book of the prophet Jesus, it is doubtful if he ever saw a copy of the New Testament. Being illiterate, he certainly never read it. Some of his ideas at least he must have derived from Gnostic sources. His statement, for instance, that it was not Jesus, but another man, whom the Jews crucified by mistake, is a notion taken from the Gnostics. The Quran thus lending itself more readily to fantastic treatment, Gnosticism found itself quite at home among the Moslems, especially with the Shiah sectaries and Sufi mystics of Persia.

The world of Islam is divided today into Sunni and Shiah Mohammedans; the first and far greater division having its stronghold in Turkey; the latter, in Persia. These again are split and subdivided, according to Moslem authorities, into more than one hundred and fifty sects. The Persian sects are said to be seventy-three. Most of these, particularly the more radical, are secret cults, outwardly conforming to orthodoxy—for in Mohammedan countries it is unsafe to be an avowed dissenter. Among some of these Shiah sects, such as the Ismailis, the Assassins, the Druses, the Ali-Allahis, the Sheikhis, and the Sufi dervishes, we find in various degrees all the Gnostic characteristics in Mohammedan garb: the pretension to exclusive knowledge of the Quran, allegory gone mad, eclecticism, esotericism, pantheism, and emanations or manifestations or reincarnations of Allah. For instance, during the second half of the ninth century, a Persian, Abdallah by name, claimed to be God. So did in the eleventh century el-Hakim, a man of monstrous cruelty, whose reappearance on earth his followers, the Druses, expect to this day.

Another man whose anticipated reappearance has played an important rôle in the history of the Mohammedan world, and is sure to be heard of again, is Mohammed ibn Hassan el-Askari, generally called the Imam Mahdi or Kaim. We must get the idea of this ever-expected Moslem Messiah clearly in mind if we would understand the rise and progress of Babism. According to the Shiah mollahs, their twelfth Imam, the Mahdi, who in

260 A. H. mysteriously disappeared from human view, is not dead at all, but hiding in a mysterious subterranean region. He still communicates with his church through men called "babs" (from *bab*, "gate") sent by him from time to time. Thence he will issue forth at the proper time to lead the faithful in slaughtering all infidels, and ushering in the Moslem millennium. Hence there is a multitude of Mohammedan adventists, ever computing, guessing at, and expecting the hidden Mahdi's auspicious appearance. Nor have they been always disappointed in their expectation. Many mystic fanatics, pure lunatics, or deliberate impostors have profited by the popular belief and have claimed to be the Expected One—and some of them with partial success. Such was, for instance, the Soudanese Mahdi, Mohammed Ahmed, who during 1882 and 1883 gained an immense following. He did not establish quite a universal empire upon the ruins of the non-Moslem powers, but succeeded in annihilating the British army under Hicks, treacherously murdering General Gordon, and establishing the kingdom of the Soudan, which was destroyed in 1898 by the avenging sword of Lord Kitchener. Another partially successful Mahdi—and this brings us to the heart of our theme—was the Persian mystic, Haji Sayyid Ali Mohammed, known as the Bab, founder of the Babist sect, the subject of the present paper.

The year 1844 (1260 A. H.) was exactly 1,000 years since the disappearance of the holy Imam Mahdi, and the whole of Persia, the land of Shiah, was on tip-toe of expectation for his advent. In the midst of this suppressed excitement of expectancy, a young Mohammedan enthusiast, of mystic tendencies, visionary frame of mind, and poor schooling, Ali Mohammed (thenceforth to be called the Bab), declared himself to be the long-expected Mahdi. He at first called himself *Bab-ed-Din*, "Door of the Faith," but later he advanced the more ambitious title of *Nokteh*, "the Point" or focus of all preceding revelations, and other Quranic and traditional titles, all of which mean the same thing—that he was the Mahdi. He announced himself to be a lineal descendant according to the flesh of the Prophet, and the sole interpreter of the Quranic mysteries. Some say

that, like Beha, one of his successors, the Bab claimed to be a manifestation of Allah. Following the illustrious example of Mohammed (who challenged his adversaries to produce a single Sura like his inspired chapters), the new prophet rested the claim of his Mahdihood upon his inspiration. He pointed out that he could spontaneously write as good verses as those of the Quran, which was likely enough, although the book is regarded by Moslems as the one thing uncreated in this universe of creation, and its beauty and celestial symmetry a standing miracle of the ages.

The authoritative announcement and specious claims of the young enthusiast at once created commotion everywhere. As was to be expected, public opinion was sharply divided upon the subject. While the majority of his countrymen rejected the claims as the ravings of a blasphemous madman, not a few accepted his pretensions with devout enthusiasm and worshipful zeal. Particularly effective upon his audience was his audacious claim of sacred-verse writing. "I beheld in him," said Mollah Mohammed Ali, of Zanja, "the most noble of the Prophet's miracles, and, had I rejected it, I should have rejected the truth of the religion of Islam,"<sup>4</sup> voicing thus the sentiments of thousands. Thus originated our Mohammedan Gnostics, called in their native Persia "Babists," from Bab, the popularized title of the founder.

From the very start Mirza Ali Mohammed had a great following. Nearly everyone was expecting the Holy Imam to appear. And here was this young Sayyid (a descendant of the Prophet), claiming to be he. Who else could he be? Did he not present as a proof of his divine person the very proof the Prophet himself presented? It was to no purpose enemies pointed out that Bab's verses were ungrammatical. The Bab in turn called attention to the fact that such was also the case of the Quran! Believers appeared all over Persia; and of the numerous Sheikhi sect, following the example of Mollah Hussein of Bushraway, Mollah Mohammed Ali of Barfurush, and Kuratu 'l-Ayn, a young woman of talent and beauty, fully one-half

<sup>4</sup> *The New History*, pp. 350 and 373.



became Babists. And each individual, as is the wont of new proselytes, was a zealous propagandist. Moreover, the new religion's permanency was secured by a well-organized hierarchy of nineteen persons, consisting of the Bab and eighteen apostles, called "The Letters of the Living."

Meanwhile the new prophet, like the faithful Islamite he was, performed, during the latter part of 1844, his pilgrimage to Mecca, thus becoming a Haji; and, returning, sent messengers before his face to announce his august approach. But while there were many individuals to whom both message and messengers were as heaven-sent, the humor of the Persians as a nation toward the new dispensation was anything but kindly. Most of the mollahs were not, or pretended not to be, satisfied with the proof of the new prophet, while the government well knew the danger to itself should the people take the fanatic seriously and recognize him as the Mahdi. Such a recognition would have made him supreme, not only in the church, but also in the state. So it came to pass that his missionaries were received badly and treated shamefully, many being beaten and imprisoned; and soon after Haji Ali Mohammed, the Bab, was himself placed in ward. But he continued to direct his well-organized hierarchy from prison, and the sect gained in numbers daily.

Although in 1844 the Bab had promised his disciples to return the next year with the sword, this sacred Mohammedan weapon did not make its appearance until three or four years later. In 1848 the Babists had grown so numerous, so restless, and so confident of success that, being harassed, they took up arms and proclaimed their leader "universal sovereign," according to Scripture. As the prophetic sovereign was still in prison, and his followers scattered all over the kingdom, therefore, unable to unite their forces, the insurgents did him and their cause very poor service by this ill-timed uprising and indiscreet proclamation. The government of the Shah, more than ever before, realized the dangerous nature of the new sect, and decided to crush it at a blow. There were uprisings in two or three places, and, although the Babists were at first successful against overwhelming numbers, they were finally conquered and put to the

sword. During the progress of one of these fights the Bab himself was taken out of prison and publicly executed, at Tabriz, on July 8, 1850. To the last the martyr held steadfast to his claim that he was el-Mahdi.<sup>5</sup>

The death of Haji Sayyid Ali Mohammed did not end Babism, as the Persian government ignorantly expected. Far from it. The martyrdom of the enthusiast, who was a good man and doubtless sincere, justly exalted him and his cause in the eyes of men; while the hierarchy the Bab left behind him was amply equipped to manage the affairs of his persecuted church. Of all earthly organizations those cemented by religion and governed by hierarchy are the most adhesive, the most persistent. As soon as the prophet, therefore, was dead, his appointed successor, Mirza Yahya, stepped in his place as the head of the Nineteen, and the work went on as before. That the new leader did not propose to take a backward step was suggestively hinted by his titles *Subh-i-Ezel*, "the Morning of Eternity," or *Hazrat-i-Ezel*, "His Holiness the Eternal."

In 1852, in order to revenge the death of their prophet, three Babists attempted to assassinate the Shah of Persia; and he, like an oriental despot, a Mohammedan at that, inflicted punishment upon the whole sect. He executed twenty-eight of its leading men with horrible tortures, and proscribed all teachers of or believers in Babism. Since then it has become more than ever a secret sect, an attitude which is particularly congenial to its Gnostic proclivities. The practice of duplicity as a fine art has become to Babism a second nature. Among Mohammedans, in every particular, they are outwardly orthodox Moslems. This persecution produced still another effect upon the sect. Mirza Yahya and the other leaders, who barely escaped with their lives across the border, seem to have decided that the Quran, after all, was by far a safer missionary weapon than the sword. Since then, although they have often used the dagger in removing non-official rivals and persecutors, they have never advocated propagation of their faith by the sword. This policy

<sup>5</sup> The claim of his American followers that he was Elijah, the prophet, was never made by him.

is said to have been adopted by Mirza Hussein Ali, of Nur, who usurped the leadership of the sect.

The next important event in the history of the sect is the "manifestation" of that man whom, for brevity's sake, writers call Beha, an abbreviation of his title, Beha'u'llah, and the schism resulting therefrom. Hussein Ali was a half-brother to Mirza Yahya, whom he assisted in governing the church, and stood high in the councils of the new religious community. Being ambitious, and a shrewder and stronger man than his mild brother, he resolved with a bold move to usurp the leadership and become the head of the hierarchy. So during 1866 or 1867, Hussein Ali, of Nur, but then at Adrianople, European Turkey, suddenly exhibited the prophetic proof of inspiration (spontaneity in uttering and writing Quran-like verses, the claim thereof being the main thing), claimed to be the One foretold by the Bab—"He whom Allah shall manifest" to finish the work begun by the Bab—and authoritatively summoned all the Babists to acknowledge him their supreme and sole spiritual chief. Although all these pretensions were opposed by *Subh-i-Ezel*, the real leader, after a sharp struggle the majority of the faithful accepted the new theophany, and Babism was split into two sects. The followers of the legitimate successor were called *Ezelis*, those of the triumphant usurper, *Behai*. Beha did not miscalculate the effect of his "manifestation." Not since Mohammed the Arabian had the world seen anything like it. At the time of his death, in 1892, he had nearly a million zealous followers.

We ought to consider for a moment the work and worth of this man; for the name Beha'u'llah bids fair to be written by the side of Confucius, Laotze, Buddha, Zoroaster, and Mohammed—names that all ages must know, all men repeat, some to disparage, some to exalt, and millions in prayer and praise. Morally standing much below him, Beha was Bab's intellectual superior. He also possessed some knowledge of occidental civilization, which was of great advantage to him in reconstructing his religious system. He borrowed copiously from Christianity without giving it credit; and, unlike Mohammed,

he seems to be familiar with the New Testament. He often takes an idea from the gospel, craftily changing its wording and application. With his shrewder mind, longer life, and riper experience, as compared with the young founder, he elaborated, edited, amended, extended, cut down, and improved the system, rendering it less fantastic, less pantheistic, and more practical. Beha was even more to Babism than Brigham Young was to Mormonism; for he not only developed the system, but made it revolve around himself. He appropriated the honors belonging to the founder of his religion, and many of those due to his Allah.

His life-history is as follows: Mirza Hussein Ali, of Nur, Persia, was the son of "a lawful concubine" of Mirza Yaha's father; therefore he was a half-brother of Subh-i-Ezel, the Prophet's appointed successor. He was an able, cunning, and ambitious man, who, after the death of the Bab, was naturally recognized as one of the leaders of the new religion. At the time of the attempted assassination of the Shah, he was imprisoned for a while on suspicion. After his release he prudently withdrew to Turkey, where he lived and died an exile, but surrounded with all the luxuries that oriental taste could crave and money and devotion supply. In the enthusiasm of his youth he was converted to Babism, but in the coolness of his manhood his shrewd foresight saw in the rising movement a career of limitless possibilities, the realization of an ambition surpassing men's dreams; and he decided to bid high for it, cost what it might. In assisting his brother to manage and instruct the fast-increasing sect, he had learned the quality of his material—their dense credulity and boundless devotion and enthusiasm. Happily, the Bab was dead and out of the way; happily, too, his utterances had been various, the more incoherent the better, and capable of being quoted in support of any claim whatsoever. All this Hussein Ali the Beha knew, and thereupon he acted with a superb audacity. Pointing at his Mohammed-like prophetic attributes, he assumed the title Beha'u'llah, "the Splendor of Allah," and claimed to be the final theophany foretold by the Bab. Thereupon he bade men pray in the direction of Akka

(his residence), "whence issueth the command to whomsoever is on the earth and in the heavens." But while thus emphasizing one of the favorite utterances of Bab's earlier prophetic career ("He whom Allah shall manifest"), Beha chose to forget the founder's later and final claim—the very claim for which he paid with his life. The fact is that, taking the utterance in its natural sense, the founder was, as the Mahdi, the fulfiller of his own earlier prediction as a mere bab. It looks as though Hussein Ali forgot on purpose that Ali Mohammed was "His Holiness the Supreme." The popularization of the founder's earlier title doubtless assisted Beha's treacherous design to degrade the martyred founder of Babism to the position of his ambitious disciple's forerunner. Our suspicion of the sinister motives of this Allah-incarnation is increased when we notice that he was not himself scrupulous as to the means of attaining his object. When inspirations and revelations failed him, like a true Mohammedan, he did not disdain to benefit by the pointed argument of the dagger or the subtle persuasion of poison. Professor Browne reluctantly records the names of sixteen persons removed by the Beha's party in this criminal way. Some of the victims were members of Bab's original "Letters of the Living." It was by such means that Beha succeeded in displacing the founder as the center of the Babi system. It is evident that, as we have said, morally Beha was much inferior to the Bab, in whom he at first believed and whom he later utilized as a stepping-stone to his self-apotheosis. And to prevent anyone, as it seems, from playing the game of "manifestation" on himself, Beha brands as an impostor whosoever shall claim a new revelation before the completion of one thousand years after him.

Beha's life and manners were exceedingly imposing. He seems to have studiously played his self-assumed rôle of divinity. He understood the gross credulity of the oriental mind; he knew how to impress and bewilder its untutored imagination, and acted accordingly. He played upon it by dramatic seclusions and dazzling appearances—seclusions behind gorgeous screens and mystic curtains, where privileged individuals were permitted to

approach his august presence in worshipful attitude, leaving their shoes behind them; and unwonted appearances, wherein he was surrounded by a brilliant court of reverential retainers. To the same end, he strove to enhance his personal attractiveness by the free use of perfumes and cosmetics. In his old age he dyed his hair black to make himself look youthful. He had plenty of means and plenty of men for this royal display; for prophethood in Beha's hands became a very lucrative business. He lived in splendor and luxury. As a practical man, he grew immensely rich from the gifts of the faithful, and did not fail to secure the succession of the Imamate in his own family. Princes laid their treasures at his feet, and begged for the privilege of being his humblest servants. He died in 1892 at Acre or Akka, Syria, and was succeeded by his son Abbas Efendi, as his vicar, who still resides there.

It was from there that a missionary of the sect was sent to propagate the faith in this country, which seems to have proven a fruitful field. According to Mollah Ibrahim G. Kheiralla, the Babi-Behai missionary to America, he converted no less than two thousand Americans during his first two years of labor. Of these about seven hundred were living in Chicago; between two hundred and fifty and three hundred in Kenosha, Racine, and Milwaukee; about four hundred in New York; and the rest in Boston and other large cities. Lately it has been reported, I know not how truly, that there are now about ten thousand Babists in the United States.<sup>6</sup> But as they are a secret cult, no outsider can know their exact number. The means for the propaganda are furnished, it is said, by a wealthy New York woman, a convert.

We turn to a study of its doctrines: (1) God is one, undifferentiated, unknown and unknowable, communicating with his world by periodic manifestations of himself. The historic manifestations of Allah are Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, David, Jesus, Mohammed, Ali Mohammed, the Bab, and Hussein Ali the Beha. The number nineteen mystically expresses the name of God and represents the manifestation of the unity of his essence.

<sup>6</sup> *The Advance*, Chicago, August 30, 1900.

Nineteen times nineteen (361) represents the sum-total of the manifested universe. All being is an emanation from Allah, and will finally be absorbed in him. (2) Prayers are prescribed three times a day, morning, afternoon, and evening, of three prostrations each, in the direction of Akka. Public or congregational prayers are abolished, except at funerals. (3) Fasts are enjoined for all during the last month of the year from sunrise to sunset daily, excepting children, travelers, the sick, the infirm, and the aged. (4) Almsgiving to the poor is commanded, although begging is condemned. (5) Pilgrimage to the shrines and tombs of the prophets and saints is recommended. These five points are held by all Mohammedans, and are called by their mollahs "the five pillars of the Faith" (Islam).

But Babism, like several other Mohammedan sects, has introduced some innovations on Moslem orthodoxy. Despite their constant reiteration that Allah is one, the Bab's theology borders on pantheism and seriously threatens the conception of the unity of the Godhead, the boast of Islam. Its most radical innovation, however, is that it supersedes Mohammed with two new prophets, who, it is claimed, have carried his work to completion, namely, the Bab and Beha, the last and greatest of all the prophets. It is this article of their faith that brings them in conflict with orthodox Mohammedans. The most original, perhaps I should say the only original, element of its doctrines is the sacredness of the number nineteen. Their hierarchy consists of nineteen persons, each of them the head of nineteen disciples. The Babi year has nineteen months; each month, nineteen days; each day, nineteen hours; each hour, nineteen minutes; each minute, nineteen seconds. All weights and measures are divided accordingly. The Bab, it appears, settled that the year consists of nineteen times nineteen days; but Beha, who had a longer experience in mundane time, discovered that there were five more days in the solar year than there ought to be. He was therefore compelled to insert them after the last month. Babism has its own new era, commencing with the "manifestation" of the Bab (1844).

Like the Druses, the Ismailis, and other Mohammedan sects,

the Babists believe in emanations from and reincarnations of Allah, although they prefer to give the doctrine another name than incarnation. In their secret lessons they teach that several of the biblical prophets, such as Daniel, Job, Noah, and Jesus, are now on earth. Jesus, they teach, has reappeared in Abbas Efendi, "the Master." The rest of the Nineteen, or the most of them, are doubtless Quranic or other Islamic saints, whose names they prefer not to tell when proselyting among Christians.

They have three great annual festivals, two of which are kept by no other Mohammedans, namely, the manifestations of the Bab and Beha, the latter being the greatest of all their festivals. They have a peculiar salutation ("*Allah'u'Abha*"), used only among themselves. The sect also introduces new laws and peculiar ceremonies, regulating funerals, inheritance, and divorce cases. Among the inspired prophetic permissions and injunctions we find that "men must not kiss each other's hands;" they should use chairs, and not sit on the ground; permission is given them to shave their beards; they are advised to cut their finger nails; birds might be lawfully eaten without uttering "*Bism'illah*" over them; talismans and amulets should be worn for protection; music is permitted; women should be admitted at table, and are even "to be allowed to appear in society." This must be a matter of pride to the American women who have embraced Babism.

The family. Babism — let us give it full credit — has condemned cruelty to animals, and has attempted to improve the awful condition of Moslem womanhood; but the aimed-at innovations fall so far below what Christian women have already enjoyed for centuries past that to us they sound more like mockery than betterments. But to Mohammedan womanhood, to be permitted music, or to eat with the rest of the family at table, or even to go into society, is a great advance. Although a curse in Christendom, Babism is a blessing in the Orient. There are other ameliorations secured in the same line. If her husband does not return nine months after he has promised to return, the wife has a right to marry another. After quarreling with her, a man has to wait a year before divorcing his wife. This is an improvement on the



custom of other Mohammedans, who may divorce the wife at any time ; but the Babi sect does not abolish the evil. It only postpones it for a year. The wife is still in a helpless state ; her fate remains entirely in the power of her husband's caprice.

Some writers say that the prophets of Babism have abolished polygamy. But that must be a mistake, which has its source in Shiah misrepresentations. Their Moslem traditions, their high devotion to Mohammed, with his eleven wives and fifteen or more concubines, are against such a supposition. In speaking of their differences and deviations from other Mohammedans, Professor Browne says nothing about their abolishing polygamy. It is incredible that he should have omitted to point out so important an advance ; for he is not only well informed, but anxious to exalt them over other Mohammedans. On the other hand, we read that " His Holiness, Mollah Mohammed Ali of Zanjan," one of the zealous apostles of the Bab, in whose cause he died a martyr, had, to the end of his life, three wives.<sup>7</sup> On similarly insecure grounds, some writers have announced the abolition of the veil. Circumcision also remains, although I do not think it is as yet introduced among the American converts. The missionary is a cautious man.

In regard to the state and its citizens, Babism seems to have taken a step backward. The inequality of men before the law is sharply emphasized. In all Mohammedan countries, following the precepts of the Quran, Sura IX, non-Moslems can live only as subjects, distinctly unequal and humiliated, but at least enjoy a nominal right to their property. In the " Truth-Knowers'" state, when that can be set up, it is ordained that unbelievers cannot have either legal or property rights. "All their property may be taken from them."

Infidels [says Professor Browne] are to be allowed no part nor lot in the future government ; they are not even permitted to reside in the five holy provinces of Fars, Irak, Azarbaijan, Khurasan, and Mazandaran, nor in any other country whose inhabitants are believers in the Beyan (one of Bab's books), unless they are merchants, or others who follow a useful profession.

Another point, more of a characteristic perhaps than doctrine, wherein we notice a relapse from, rather than an advance on,

<sup>7</sup> *The New History*, p. 160.

orthodox Islam, is their feigned conformity to the dominant religion whose adherents they are striving to convert. This has inevitably led them to a policy of deliberate duplicity, to them a pious means to a pious end. Since Beha's influence has become paramount, they have adopted the plan of "secret propaganda," as someone states, "which does not hesitate, in case of need, at denying their belief under oath." Among Mohammedans they use the Quran, worship in the mosques, and claim to be primitive Islamites; among Christians they claim to be nothing but primitive Christians. In their secret "lessons" they allegorize and explain away many of these things; but in public, by means of mental reservation and the use of words in a double sense, they appear, as they mean to appear, perfectly orthodox. In their teachings they speak constantly of knowing the truth, but never of *speaking the truth*. In his book *Bab-ed-Din: the Door of True Religion*, Mollah Kheiralla never mentions veracity among the virtues, nor lying among the vices. Mendacity, as is well known, is an oriental art. No man can fully appreciate the Scripture saying, "all men are liars," until he has resided in the Orient; but religious duplicity, a well-known doctrine called *ketman* or *takiva*, is a Persian peculiarity. The Shiah, to which division the Persians for the most part belong, are permitted to dissimulate in matters of religion. And some Mohammedan sects, among which are our truth-knowing Babists, have raised this permission to a pious privilege.

It is plain, then, that in origin, tradition, spirit, and character, Babi-Behaism is Mohammedan; in method and form, Gnostic. It is unnecessary to say, as some superficial writers do, that it contains Mohammedan, Jewish, Christian, Zoroastrian, Buddhistic, Kabbalistic, and Gnostic elements. As we have seen, Mohammed never formally repudiated the Bible. Islamism implies both Jewish and Christian elements, while Gnosticism embraces all the rest. Mohammedan Gnosticism expresses this cult precisely.

In calling Babi-Behaism a worse and more pernicious cult than Mormonism, I do so deliberately. The chief objections to Mormonism are two: First, its hierarchy, by means of which it

can marshal a compact organization of its devotees and thus acquire a menacing political power. Secondly, people rightly object to its institution of polygamy, by means of which it degrades womanhood and desecrates the purity of the family. Now, Babism possesses both of these execrable features with emphasis, and, in addition, introduces at least three more: first the spirit of removing religious rivals and antagonists by means of the sword, if not the tacit command to do so; the use of the sword is inseparable from Mohammedan piety; secondly, deliberate religious duplicity; and, thirdly, the far more dangerous element of esotericism or secrecy in religion, and that backed by a compact oriental hierarchy, beyond the ken and power of the country's laws. I do not mean to say that all these features would be introduced immediately. It requires years to Mohammedanize the spirit of its votaries. It will take decades before an American Babist can approve assassination or enjoy an Armenian massacre. New converts, who are brought up in the midst of Christian civilization, would be shocked by the very idea of such practices. There might be such a thing as a sudden conversion; but degeneration as well as regeneration requires time.

Moreover, policy requires that the most objectionable features should be introduced gradually. This fact has not been overlooked by Beha, their crafty chief, with whom policy in consideration of expediency, often at the expense of good faith, is one of his strongest points, one of his cardinal virtues—if I may so abuse the term. Until the final triumph of the religion, he has sanctioned feigned conformity. From their point of view, Babists have divine authority for duplicity. Accordingly, in Persia they use the Quran only, attend the teachings of the mollahs, and worship in the ordinary mosques; while in this country, although they do not go to church (there being no persecution), they quote the Bible only and declare themselves, before the uninitiated, “good Christians.”

This characteristic may be illustrated by the equivocal use of the name of Christ. I have heard a Babist missionary lecture in Kenosha before an uninitiated audience upon the “Fundamental

Principles of the Truth-Knowers," wherein he never mentioned the name of the founder of the religion under discussion, nor the other "manifestation," nor its sacred writings. It was as if one should speak in Persia on the fundamentals of Protestantism, with Protestantism changed to some euphonious local term, and the names of Christ, Paul, Luther, Europe, Palestine, and the New Testament left out, or referred to covertly under historical Mohammedan names. The address was so worded that it left the impression, and purposely so, that the system was Christocentric, as is any Christian cult.<sup>8</sup> Nothing could be farther from the truth. For them the historic Christ is a mere prophet, inferior to Mohammed, to Ali Mohammed, the Bab, and to Hussein Ali. It is this man, as I have already shown, whom they call Beha'u'llah ("the Splendor of Allah"), "the Manifestation," "the Supreme Horizon," etc., etc., that stands at the center of their fantastic system. They agree with all Mohammedans in the preposterous belief that Jesus prophesied the coming of Mohammed in order to complete this work of which Islam and the Quran were the fruit; but differ from them in adding a far more abominable article, namely, that Christ's sole mission on earth was—to prepare the world for, and to announce the advent of, Hussein Ali of Nur! This particular sect is even farther removed from Christianity, and more obnoxious, than ordinary Mohammedanism. While other Moslems rate Christ below Mohammed, these rate him not only as inferior to Mohammed, but to two other men besides.

Their other singular view of Christ is furnished by their reincarnation theory. Beha, at his death, as I have already stated, was succeeded by his son, Abbas Efendi, who, as the "point" of the Nineteen, is the head of their hierarchy. He is a kind of turbaned pope, enjoying a degree of authority and tribute of devotion to be envied by him of Rome. Although not as great, of course, as Beha, "the Supreme Horizon," Abbas Efendi is his son and vicar, usually called by the faithful "the Master." This man the "Truth-Knowers" have seen fit to regard as Jesus the Christ, reincarnated, and seriously so regard

<sup>8</sup> See Kenosha (Wis.) papers, November 20, 1899.

him. It is he whom they have in mind when American Babists reply affirmatively to the question, "Do you believe in Christ?" It was he, Abbas Efendi, that the missionary had in mind when in the lecture referred to he declared: "We fully believe in our great Master, Jesus, the Christ, and in all his teachings;" it was in this man's mouth that he put the words: "My father is greater than I," meaning his father according to the flesh, namely Beha; while his audience thought, and it was intended they should think, that the oriental teacher was quoting the New Testament in a Christian sense. And had I not taken their esoteric teachings, "private lessons," as they prefer to call them, I should have understood him as his audience did. The supposition of such astounding duplicity would have appeared incredible or beyond even the oriental proverbial mendacity.

As the fact of a successful Islamic propaganda in America seems so incredible, the more so because the teachers endeavor to pass it under another name, let me in closing put together some of my reasons for calling the body of "Truth-Knowers" of Kenosha and Chicago a Mohammedan sect.

1. It originated (in 1844) in a Mohammedan country, Persia.
2. The founder of the sect was a zealous Mohammedan mystic, Ali Mohammed, called the Bab (1820-50), who claimed to be a lineal descendant according to the flesh, as well as in the spirit, of the great Arabian Mohammed. He also based all his teachings and reforms, all his fantastic claims, on the Quran and acknowledged Moslem traditions. His name and titles, given, assumed, or acquired (Haji Sayyid, Ali Mohammed, the Bab), are the most Mohammedan of Mohammedan names and titles. "Sayyid" means that he is a descendant of the Prophet; "Haji," he has been on a pilgrimage to Mecca; "Ali," the name of Mohammed's nephew, whom the Persians venerate on equality with the Prophet; "Mohammed" does not require explanation; and "Bab" or "Bab-ed-Din" is taken from the well-known Shiah belief connected with the Hidden Imam el-Mahdi.

3. In accordance with his claims to preach pure Islamism, the Bab, like his successors in office, never hesitated to rate the

Quran as a later, fuller, and superior revelation to that of the Bible, and to exalt his ancestor and predecessor Mohammed above Christ.

4. Moreover, I know that the "Truth-Knowers" believe, and in their "private lessons" teach, that Mohammed is a true prophet. In calling believers in the Arabian prophet Mohammedans, I only follow the accepted custom of the world.

5. The "Truth-Knowers" recognize the Quran as the "Book of God," although they say that it has been corrupted, in which they agree with Shiah Mohammedans as against the Sunni. The sacred books of the sect cite the Quran only in support of their claims.

6. They have no ordained clergy, which is another Mohammedan characteristic.

7. They hold their public meetings on Friday, which is the Moslem day for weekly public worship. The Babists of Persia, who are in every particular identical with the American "Truth-Knowers," not only meet on Friday, but worship with the Shiah Mohammedans in the ordinary mosques.

8. They (the American Babists) teach that the East, meaning the Moslem world, particularly Arabia, is the perennial source of all true knowledge and wisdom. Arabia's moral and intellectual supremacy is an article of conviction firmly held by every devout Mohammedan the world over, and is one of the chief causes of their intellectual and moral stagnation.

9. Their present head and headquarters, both of Persian Babists and American "Truth-Knowers," are in Mohammedan Turkey, namely, at Akka or Acre, Syria.

10. The American propagandist brought this teaching from the Mohammedan Orient. "From the Orient," he writes, "whence every preacher and prophet has appeared, I have been sent to teach this religion to the people of this country." His name (Ibrahim Kheiralla) is characteristically Islamic. Ibrahim is the Arabic for Abraham; Kheiralla is composed of two Arabic words: *kheir*, "goodness," and *alla*, "god." Allah is the Mohammedan name for God the world over.

11. Hussein Ali, "the Splendor of Allah," the acknowledged

spiritual head of Babism, whose pretensions to be a greater divinity than the Bab himself are recognized by most Babists, including the American branch, called by them in their secret teachings "the Manifestation"—this the greatest authority among them calls Mohammed: "His Highness the Seal of the Prophets," "the King of the Elect," "the Sun of Truth," "the Sun of the Highest Horizon," etc. Could anybody be a more loyal Mohammedan than Hussein Ali, the Beha? In his "Letter to the King of Persia"<sup>9</sup> he declares that Babism teaches nothing contrary to the Quran, "the Book of God," as he devoutly calls it, quoting verse after verse from it in support of his assertion. I do not know how the letter affected his majesty, the Shah; but I acknowledge myself a convert as against the public declarations of his followers in this country. In reading it I was more than ever convinced of the fact that this cult is one of the many sects of Islam.

12. Finally, the Bab himself, like his successor, plainly calls it Islam; and, being its founder, he certainly ought to know. In his commentary on the Quran, Sura Joseph, Ali Mohammed says: "Whosoever denies Islam, Allah will not accept from him any of his actions in the day of the resurrection." In plain words, no virtue will avail you before God, unless you are a Mohammedan.

Now, for all these reasons combined, most of which are conclusive singly, I call the "Truth-Knowers" a Mohammedan sect; and no student could call them anything else.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>9</sup> *A Traveller's Narrative*, p. 58.

<sup>10</sup> Should anyone have doubts in regard to my statement that the Babists of Persia and the "Truth-Knowers" of the United States are the same, let him see MR. KHEIRALLA's book, published in Chicago, entitled *Beha 'U'llah*, a notice of which is found in this number of the JOURNAL.